

PAVING THE WAY TO AACSB STANDARDS FOR THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS WITH STUDENT PORTFOLIOS: A MARKETING DEPARTMENT INITIATIVE

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Introduction

Business schools are under pressure from accreditation agencies, state legislatures, university governing boards and employers to assess what has been learned in the classroom. The emphasis is on improving student learning by assuring stakeholders that stated knowledge is taught and important skills are developed. Higher education in the public sector has come under intense scrutiny than in the past as tax payers demand it, and in part, because of the competitive climate for educational choices. In addition, AACSB International acknowledged the need for business schools to provide evidence of student learning and demonstrate continuous improvement processes are in place when outcomes do not meet expectations. This paper utilizes a case-based approach and charts the experience of one marketing department at a large mid-western university to develop portfolios as an assessment tool and how such efforts align with AACSB International, College of Business (COB), and department goals.

Background

Currently, the department implements a number of indirect assessment tools to determine if identified student learning outcomes are being met. Assessment information is captured from the capstone course, department alumni surveys, student internship performance reports, senior job placement surveys, sales course evaluations, and advisory board input. The idea of a student portfolio was discussed at length during a curriculum committee meeting and subsequently presented to the faculty. Endorsement was provided by The Dean's Office and department chair and faculty because of its ability to meet AACSB and COB standards. Next, a Portfolio Committee was established and members requested funding from the University Office of Assessment Services. With support granted, ten peer schools were contacted regarding portfolio use and the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. The information was compiled, a report presented to the faculty, and a decision made to go forward with student portfolios.

The department developed eight learning objectives which describe what graduates will know or be able to do in specific measurable terms including mastery of marketing concepts, problem solving and critical thinking, written and oral communication, technology use, team effectiveness, global business knowledge and ethical awareness. The input mix included a well-rounded balanced

of department stakeholders including alumni, employers, staff and faculty and therefore offered continuity between AACSB and COB standards. The Portfolio Committee identified potential assignments in each course demonstrating mastery of each learning objective. Faculty approved the learning objectives, the list of potential assignments, and a pilot test was initiated to assess the efficacy of the developed rubric. Portfolios were collected the last week of class and evaluated by the Portfolio Committee.

The committee developed specific assessment criteria for each of the identified objectives. The evaluation standard determined an assignment demonstrated a good understanding of all five areas would be deemed “exceptional” and an understanding of three areas “satisfactory”. Each portfolio was evaluated independently by two faculty and rated “exceptional”, “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” for each learning objective.

Pilot test results revealed six of eight learning objectives were adequately addressed. Global Business Knowledge and Ethical Awareness objectives were not up to expectations. The most recent AACSB standards document (<http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/standards.asp>) specifically lists “ethical understanding and reasoning abilities” and “domestic and global economic environments of organization” as critical learning experiences for business students. The committee determined AACSB mandate and the COB commitment to ethical and global issues necessitated remedial steps. The Portfolio Committee discussed various options to systematically adding global business knowledge and ethical awareness into the curriculum. The department incorporated changes recommended by the committee and portfolios became a requirement for all graduating students.

Portfolio Requirements and Evaluation

Department of Marketing uses portfolios to assess whether marketing majors are meeting specific learning objectives identified as important for all graduates. For the student, a portfolio represents a collection of works used to highlight skills, talents and learning. It may be a selective collection of only a student’s best work, examples of evolving skills/talents over a period of learning, or a combination of both. A student may also use a portfolio to show prospective employers tangible evidence of his/her accomplishments and skills and thereby serve as a source of competitive advantage during job search. The portfolio must include representative work from marketing classes demonstrating acceptable performance in each of eight learning objectives.

Findings and Recommendations

The Portfolio Committee developed criteria and evaluation rubric to assess student and department performance based on portfolio content. Each learning objective was rated on a 7 point scale with 7 equating to exceptional work with a target average rating of 5.5. The evaluation period occurred two weeks following finals during the fall, spring, and summer semesters. Inter rater

reliability averaged 95.9% indicating consensus among committee members regarding student performance on eight learning outcomes.

Based on a five year evaluation by the Portfolio Committee, discussions with faculty and department student advisor, many changes were made to enhance the portfolio usefulness to students and faculty. First, a concerted effort was undertaken to ensure that each learning outcomes was address in multiple marketing course so that student are exposed to each one both at the beginning and end of their major coursework. Second, regardless as to which instructors are teaching individual sections of courses, there is now almost 100% compliance to the request from the Portfolio Committee that like courses include similar assignments or means of achieving the same learning outcomes. Third, in response to evaluations made by Portfolio Committee Members and capstone course instructors, the department dropped the technology learning objective and replaced it with marketing metrics as most students were familiar with basic technology use before declaring marketing as a major. Fourth, faculty was encouraged to include more writing in their coursework. A writing lab was established, funded and is now housed in the department. Fifth, special technology has been added to sales classrooms so that more attention can be focused on oral communication and presentation skills. Sixth, two new classes were developed; Marketing 410 Professional Selling and Cultural Perspectives and Marketing 415 Global Sales Perspectives to provide students with more global business experience. Seventh, Portfolio Committee members now conduct classroom visits to convey portfolio particulars. In addition, students in the capstone course are regularly provided with detailed instructions on how to submit professional portfolios from their instructors. Eight, storage space (office) has been allocated and designated to house individual portfolios in the department so students can begin compiling portfolio material on a formal basis in their semesters as majors.

Conclusions

This paper addresses how a marketing department has developed several means of measuring student learning which complement AACSB International and COB standards. Indirect assessment measures include capstone course, departmental alumni surveys, student internship performance reports, senior job placement surveys, sales course evaluations and advisory board input. Recently developed direct measure includes student portfolios with eight learning objectives, requirements for each one and assessment rubric. Taken together qualitative and quantitative feedback provide for curriculum enhancement and exhibit accountability and continuous improvement. Critical portfolio success factors included faculty involvement, formation of a Portfolio Committee, commitment at the college and university levels, student knowledge of portfolio requirements and a non-rushed process facilitating the understanding of all involved.

Future research will be directed at investigating how peer institutions have implemented and made improvements to curriculum and programs. A more comprehensive investigation might

compare peer institutions with other institutions engaging in assessing marketing department student learning. We hope this research has inspired others to start or continue with assessing student learning. It is important to our students and all of our stakeholders.